

## **State Funded Child Development Centers Directors Forum**

### **Testimony on HB 5557**

#### **An Act Concerning Recruitment and Retention of Early Childhood Teachers**

"Increasing the employability and stability of parents reduces the impact of poverty on children and sustains our nation's workforce and economy" (CCDBG guidance, 2015)

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Committee:

My name is Carol Smith and I am the Director of the M. C. Griffin Child Development Center of Southington, Inc. I would like to applaud the Education Committee for raising HB 5557 that for the first time will acknowledge and address the low compensation for teachers in State Funded Child Development Centers and School Readiness Programs subject to the education credentials and program accreditation in CGA 10-16p.

The bill would require the Office of Early Childhood to increase reimbursement rates to phase in a compensation schedule to raise teacher salaries to help recruit and retain qualified teachers. With the current budget crisis, we ask that within the funding streams for publically funded child care and pre-school programs that raising salaries be made a priority.

I recently organized the old photo albums at the Child Development Center and what do you think I found? Let me tell you. It was a photo of me, fresh out of college in 1976 and working as a Teacher at the child development center. My starting salary was \$5,500.00. I was seated at a hearing with my local representatives, parents, members of our Board of Directors and representatives from our funding agency which at that time was the State Department of Community Affairs. The focus of that meeting was low staff wages. Here I am 40 years later appalled that we are still fighting for the same cause....worthy wages for college educated teachers working with our state's most valuable resource—our children.

For the first time ever, this year I am faced with losing three of my long time staff members. They will take with them years of dedication, a love of the field of Early Childhood Education and a true understanding of the diverse families we serve. How will I ever replace them? Should I advertise that I have a year round, full time teaching position available for a degreed teacher willing to work 40+ hours with a starting salary of \$29, 00.00? Should I place my ad next to the numerous other ads from centers all over the state of Connecticut?

Our programs are only as good as the teachers we employ!! Let me quote the NAEYC criteria for Teachers Standard, as they say it better than I am able to. "The program employs and supports a teaching staff that has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development and to support families' diverse needs and interests". Your support is critical in order to continue to meet these important and mandated requirements.

**Where Will the Funding Come From?** The Governor challenges us to leverage shrinking resources and set priorities for funding. We offer the following ideas on how to cut spending at

the Office of Early Childhood and focus on funding direct child care to families and improved wages for teachers:

1. Focus on quality childcare for working parents:  
There should be a temporary moratorium on new slots to be allocated for Smart Start, School Readiness, or any other preschool program. Funding in the budget for those new slots should be repurposed to maintain and augment reimbursement rates to increase wages to stabilize the child care industry.
2. Reduce funding for expansion of the Quality Improvement System and focus on direct services to children and families. State Funded Centers are required to be NAEYC accredited and teachers must have BA degrees by 2020. Extending Quality Improvement measures (QIS) to all child care settings stretches scarce resources and should be delayed until appropriate dollars are put into the system.
3. Establish equity among all state early childhood programs including those offered by local school districts relative to rates, requirements, parent fees, data collection, etc.
4. Delay implementation of costly regulations in the new State Child Care Plan. CT relies on the Child Care Development Block Grant, known as Care4Kids, to fund child care in all types of settings: state funded centers; family child care; and kith and kin.

In summary, State Funded Child Development Centers and School Readiness programs serve low and moderate income families and the dedicated front line teachers need to be compensated in a fair and equitable manner. We ask that the Legislature support HB 5557 and direct the Office of Early Childhood to make this a budget priority. This bill charts a new course for Connecticut's early care and education system. Thank you for your consideration of this bill.